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Proviso in 1847, because, as he privately wrote, it would be the means of "enabling us to force the issue on the North." In this design, at length, when he had been ten years in the grave, he succeeded. Had there been no Calhoun, it is possible—nay, it is not improbable—that that issue might have been deferred till the North had so outstripped the South in accumulating all the elements of power, that the fire-eaters themselves would have shrunk from submitting the question to the arbitrament of the sword. It was Calhoun who forced the issue upon the United States, and compelled us to choose between annihilation and war.

ART. IV.—1. *Lectures on the Science of Language, delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in April, May, and June, 1861.* By MAX MÜLLER, M. A. New York: Charles Scribner. 1863. 12mo.

2. *Die Darwinsche Theorie und die Sprachwissenschaft.* . . . Von AUG. SCHLEICHER. Weimar. 1863. 8vo. pp. 29.

It is no long time since those who are engaged in the study of language have begun to arrogate to it the rank and title of a science. For the philology even of the beginning of the present century no such claim had been advanced, and with reason: it was still mainly a special branch of historical investigation, engaged in eliciting information respecting the men and institutions of bygone days, from documents in which their deeds and fates had been deliberately recorded. Grammar was pursued for the practical end of gaining acquaintance with the language of these records. Etymology was the handmaid of lexicography, an aid in determining the meaning of words, and the history of their meaning. A little phonology helped the orderly exposition of the orthographical and orthoepical laws of the languages studied. It is not, indeed, to be denied that these and the various other constitutive and accessory departments of philology had their occasional outlooks toward something higher and broader. All the rudiments of linguistic

science were already in being. General phonology, general etymology, general grammar, the relationships of languages in their varying degrees, and their bearing upon the genealogy of races, the historical development and origin of language, — all these had attracted the attention and engrossed the effort of human minds. They were matters of too engaging an aspect, of too pressing an interest, not to have absorbed a certain share of regard, from the time when men first began to inquire into things and their causes. But the attention had been fitful only, the effort too little sustained and too ill-directed to yield a science as their result. Empty hypotheses, baseless assumptions, inconclusive argumentation, were as rife in the study of language as in that of astronomy or of chemistry while yet in their preliminary stages of astrology and alchemy. To converge and concentrate the scattered inquiries and give them their true direction, to show the possibility of a science and make its growth practicable, there were wanting both the material and the method. The circumstances and tendencies of our time at length furnished both. The unequalled literary, commercial, and philanthropic activity of the nineteenth century opened the numberless dialects of the ancient and modern world to the knowledge of the student. He had but to assemble and arrange the facts thus put within his reach, and to draw conclusions from them in the now well-known manner of the other inductive sciences, to be guided to the results he was seeking. The collectors and first rude classifiers of languages, like Adelung and Vater, led the way. But of vastly more telling importance were the labors of those who, instead of skimming superficially the whole field, threw themselves upon a single limited part of it, and showed how language was to be fruitfully investigated. Such men were Grimm, who with incredible toil worked out the history of the Germanic dialects, making each explain the growth and character of all, and all of each; and Bopp, who solved a like problem in the higher terms of the Indo-European tongues, the tongues of Europe and South-western Asia. Here was the true beginning of linguistic science. The great mass of the languages of this family — descendants of a common original, covering a period of four thousand years in the past, with their numerous converging

lines of linguistic development — supplied just the foundation that was needed for the science to grow up upon, elaborating its methods, getting fully into view its ends, and finding out the means of attaining them. The discovery of the Sanscrit came in at the right time to help the work notably forward. The great antiquity of this venerable mother of the dialects of India, its remarkable conservation of primitive material and forms, and its unrivalled transparency of structure, gave it the first place among all the tongues of the Indo-European family. Upon their comparison, already begun, it cast a new and brilliant light; showing forth clearly their hitherto obscure relations, rectifying their uncertain etymologies, and illustrating the laws of research which must be followed in their study, and in that of all other forms of human speech. What linguistic science might have become without such a basis as that afforded it in the Indo-European dialects, what Indo-European philology might have become without the Sanscrit, it is needless to speculate; certain it is that they could not have grown so fast, nor have reached the state of advancement in which we now behold them. But how ripe the age was for the birth of this new branch of human knowledge, how necessary an outgrowth it was of the circumstances amid which it arose, is shown by the fact that its principles were, more or less fully, worked out independently, at so nearly the same period, by several different scholars, — by Rask, Bopp, Grimm, Burnouf.

To follow out in detail the history of linguistic science, or to show what it is and what it attempts, is not, however, our present purpose. We wish rather to discuss a question, of no slight importance, bearing upon the position and relations of the science; a question respecting which there is great difference of opinion among those even who are its eminent cultivators. In the works whose titles are placed at the head of this article, it is distinctly claimed and argued that the study of language is a physical science, to be ranked along with zoölogy, botany, chemistry, geology; that it is not to be placed among those branches of knowledge which we are accustomed to call historical or moral. Now this is, at least, contrary to the popular impression prevalent through the community of scholars and cultivated men. General opinion classes the linguistic student

with the philologist, the archæologist, the historian, the mental philosopher ; nor have we yet observed that the physicists have hastened to welcome the linguists, in compliance with the claim set up in their behalf, into their own body, as engaged in pursuing the same end by like means with themselves. If the public mind is mistaken upon this point, the error should be pointed out and rectified ; if the votaries of physical science are unreasonably exclusive and recalcitrant, they should be won over to a better disposition. But least of all can it be borne, that students of language should remain in doubt, or should differ among themselves, as to where and among whom their science and they belong. For the question is one which touches the very foundations of linguistic study ; its decision must rest upon the view we take of the nature of language itself, and the nature of the power by which it is sustained in existence, changed, and developed. Is speech a natural product, and does it grow by forces inherent in itself, and independent of those by whom it is used ? or is it the work of us who speak it, maintained, extended, altered, by our consenting action ? — this is the real point involved in the discussion. Nor do the writers whose views we are to examine fail to see and distinctly state it thus. Müller acknowledges that if language is produced and changed by human agency, its study must be an historical science, not a physical ; but he denies the premises, and asserts that, while “ art, science, philosophy, and religion all have a history, language, or any other production of nature, admits only of growth.” (p. 47.) And the text upon which Schleicher’s whole exposition is founded runs as follows : “ Languages are natural organisms, which, without being determinable by the will of man, arose, grew, and developed themselves, and again grow old and die out, according to determinate laws : to them, too, belongs that series of phenomena which we are wont to signify by the name ‘ life.’ Glottic, accordingly, the science of language, is a natural science.” (pp. 6, 7.)

This is also, as must be confessed, a view which finds an obvious support in much of our popular phraseology respecting language. We are accustomed often to speak of it as of something possessing an independent existence, apart from those who use it. We talk of living and dead languages, of the

growth and decay of language, of its organic structure, of its laws of development; we refer to it as feeling tendencies, as adapting itself to the wants of a people, and much more of the same sort. What is the real meaning of all this? are we talking in plain facts, or are we, with an excusable inaccuracy, employing tropes and figures, not misled by them, but recognizing upon reflection the bare truths which they cover and adorn? Do we actually believe language a being, with a growth, or do we all the time know it to be an institution, with a history?

Nothing, it is believed, can lead us more directly and surely to distinctness of apprehension respecting these points than an inquiry into the way in which we came into possession of our own language, and the tenure by which we hold it. Why do we ourselves speak English as our native language, or mother tongue, instead of any other of the thousand varying forms of speech prevalent on the earth?

There can be but one answer to this question: we speak English because we learned it of those who surrounded us in our infancy and growing age. It is our mother tongue, because we caught it from the lips of our mothers; our native language, because we were born — not, indeed, into the possession of it, but — into the company of those who themselves already spoke it, having acquired it in the same manner before us. We were not left to work out by our own powers the great problem of how to talk. In our case, there was no development of language out of internal resources, by the reflection of phenomena in consciousness, by the action of a natural impulse, shaping ideas and creating suitable expression for them. No sooner were our minds so far matured that we were able intelligently to associate an idea and its sign, than we learned, first, to recognize the persons and things about us by the names which others applied to them, and then to apply to them the same names ourselves. Thus, in the beginning, we learned to stammer the names of father and mother, put, for our convenience, in the easiest accents which infant lips can frame. As we grew on, we gained daily more and more, partly by direct instruction, partly by imitation; those who had the care of us contracted their ideas and simplified their speech, to suit our feeble capacities; they watched with interest every

new vocable we mastered, corrected our numberless errors, explained what we but half understood, laughed at us when we used longer words and more ambitious phrases than we could employ correctly or wield adroitly, and drilled us in the utterance of sounds which come hard to the beginner. The kind and degree of the training thus given, indeed, varied greatly in different cases, as did the provision made for the wants of childhood in respect to other matters; as, for instance, the food, the dress, the moral nurture. Just as some have to rough their way by the hardest paths through the scenes of early life, beaten, half starved, clad in scanty rags, while yet some care and provision were wholly indispensable, and no child could have lived through infancy without them, — so, in respect to language, many get but the coarsest and most meagre instruction, and yet instruction enough to help them through the first stages of learning how to speak, even if it consist merely in an example furnished for imitation. In the worst case, there must have been constantly before and around every one of us in our earliest years an amount and style of speech surpassing our acquirements and beyond our reach, but of which we constantly appropriated more and more, as we were able. In proportion as our minds increased in activity and power of comprehension, and our knowledge was augmented, our notions and conceptions were brought into shapes agreeing with those which they took in the minds about us, and were called by appellations already in familiar use. When we made acquaintance with certain common liquids, colorless or white, we had not to study their properties in order to devise suitable titles for them; we were taught that these were “water” and “milk.” The one of them, when standing stagnant in patches, or sparkling between green banks, we styled, at the bidding of our instructors, “puddle” and “brook.” An elevation rising blue in the distance, or towering nearer above our heads, struck our attention, and drew forth the staple inquiry of childhood, “What is that?” — the answer, “A mountain,” “A hill,” brought to our vocabulary one of the innumerable additions which it gained in a like way. Certain actions, incident to even the best-regulated childhood, much reproof taught us to know by the names “cry,” “strike,” “kick,” “bite,” and so on. Among the feel-

ings of which we were conscious, we learned to signify one by the expression "I love"; an inferior degree of the same feeling we were made to distinguish by "I like," and their opposite by "I hate." Long before any process of analysis and combination carried on in our own minds would have given us the distinct conceptions of true and false, of good and naughty, they were carefully set before us, and their reception enforced by faithful admonition, or something yet more serious. The appellations of hosts of objects, of places, of beings, which we had never seen, and perhaps have not even yet seen, were made known to us by hearing or by reading, and direct instruction enabled us to attach to them some distinctive conception, more or less complete and adequate. Thus, for instance, we had not to cross the seas and traverse and coast about a certain island, in order to know that there is a country "England," and to hold it apart, by specific attributes, from other countries of which we obtained like knowledge by like means.

But enough of this illustration. It is already sufficiently clear that the acquisition of language was one of the steps of our early education. We did not make our own language, or any part of it; we implicitly received and appropriated, as well as we could, whatever was set before us. Independence of the general usages of speech was neither encouraged nor tolerated in us; nor did we feel tempted toward independence. Our object was to communicate with those among whom our lot was cast, to understand them and be understood by them. In order to this, we had to think and talk as they did, and we were content to do so. Why such and such a complex of articulations was applied to designate such and such an idea was to us a matter of indifference; it was enough that others so applied it; questions of etymology, of fitness of appellation, concerned us not. What knew or cared we, for instance, when the answer came to one of our inquiries after names, that *mountain* was brought into our speech from the Latin, and was originally an adjective, meaning "hilly, mountainous," while *hill* was of Germanic descent, and once had a *g* in it, which proved its relationship with the adjective *high*? We recognized no tie between any word and the idea represented by it, excepting a mental association, which we had ourselves established, under

the guidance of others. Thus every vocable was an arbitrary and conventional sign: arbitrary, because any one of a thousand other vocables could have been just as easily learned by us and associated with the same idea; conventional, because the one we adopted had its sole ground and sanction in the consenting usage of the community of which we formed a part. Inheritance, then, had nothing to do with the transmission of speech to us. English descent would never have made us talk English. No matter of what race we were, if those about us had said *wasser* and *milch*, or *eau* and *lait*, instead of "water" and "milk," we should have done the same. It would have been no harder for us to learn *lieben* or *aimer* than "love," *Wahrheit* or *vérité* than "truth." An American or English mother, anxious that her child should grow up duly accomplished, gives it a French nurse, and takes care that no English be spoken in its hearing; and, though all its ancestors back to the Mayflower, or to the Conqueror, have been only Smiths, Browns, and Robinsons, it inevitably talks French first, as if this were its own "mother" tongue. An infant is taken alive from the arms of its drowned mother, the only waif cast upon the shore from the wreck of a strange vessel, and it acquires the tongue of its foster-parents: no outbreak of natural and hereditary speech ever betrays whence it derived its birth. The child of parents of different race and native speech learns the tongue of either, as circumstances and their choice may determine; or it learns both, and is equally at home in them, hardly knowing which to call its native language. The bands of Africans, stolen from their homes and imported into America, forget in a generation their Congo or Mendi, and learn a *patois* in which they can communicate with their fellow-slaves and with their masters. The Irish peasantry, mingled with and domineered over by English colonists, governed by English laws, feeling the whole weight, for good and for evil, of a superior English civilization, incapacitated from rising above a condition of poverty and ignorance without command of English speech, unlearn by degrees their native Celtic tongue, and substitute for it the dialect of the ruling and cultivated class.

Our acquisition of English, however, has as yet been but imperfectly described. In the first place, not only do we thus

learn English, but we learn that peculiar form or local variety of English which is current among our instructors and models. Few can have been surrounded from birth by those only whose speech is wholly conformed to standards recognized as perfect. Few, then, can escape acquiring in their youth some tinge of local dialect, of slang characteristic of grade or occupation, of personal peculiarities even, belonging to their initiators into the mysteries of speech. These may be mere inelegances of pronunciation, appearing in individual words or in the general tone of utterance, like the nasal twang, and the flattening of *ou* into *ǎu*, which common fame injuriously ascribes to the Yankee; or they may be ungrammatical modes of expression, or uncouth and unusual turns and forms of construction; or favorite recurrent phrases, such as "I guess," "I calculate," "I reckon," "I expect," each having its own region of prevalence; or colloquialisms and vulgarisms, which ought to hide their heads in good English society; or words of dialectic currency, unknown to the general language; or other the like. All these we innocently learn along with the rest of our speech, not knowing how to distinguish the evil from the good. And often, as many find out to their cost, errors and infelicities are thus so deeply imprinted upon us in our childhood's years, that not all the instruction and care of after life can wholly wipe out their traces. It is not alone true that he who has thoroughly learned his mother tongue is thereby almost disqualified from ever attaining a native facility, correctness, and elegance in any foreign language; one may also so thoroughly acquire a bad style, a corrupt dialect of his native speech, as never to be able to ennoble it into a pure and cultivated diction. Yet, with us, the influences which tend to repress and eradicate local peculiarities and errors are numerous and powerful. School instruction, intercourse with correct speakers, reading of books,—which is but another form of such intercourse,—are the great safeguards which keep the popular speech what it ought to be. Our language is improved and perfected, as it was at first learned, by care and study, by the consulting of authorities, by following the example of those who speak better than ourselves.

Again, while the process of training thus described may give general correctness and ease, it does not confer universal command of the resources of the language. The vocabulary which the young child has learned to use is a very scanty one ; it includes only the most indispensable part of speech, names for the commonest objects, the most ordinary and familiar conceptions, the simplest relations. You can talk with a child only on a certain limited range of subjects ; a book not written especially for his benefit is in great part unintelligible to him. He has not yet learned its signs for thought, and they must be translated into others with which he is acquainted ; or the thought is itself beyond the reach of his apprehension, the statement is outside the sphere of his knowledge. But in this regard we are all of us more or less children. Who ever yet got through learning his mother tongue, and could say, "The work is done"? The encyclopedic English language, as we may term it, the English of the great dictionaries, contains more than a hundred thousand words ; and these are only a selection out of a greater mass. If all the signs for thought employed for purposes of communication by those who have spoken and who speak no other tongue than English were gathered together, the number stated would be vastly augmented. Of the one hundred thousand, it has been reckoned by careful observers that a considerable part of the English-speaking community, comprising the lowest and most ignorant class, learn to use not more than three thousand, which are, of course, like the child's vocabulary, the most necessary portion of the language, signs for the commonest and simplest ideas. To a nucleus like this, every artisan, though otherwise uninstructed, must add the technical language of his own craft, — names for tools, and processes, and products, which his every-day experience makes familiar to him, but of which the vast majority, perhaps, of those outside his own line of life know nothing. Ignorant as he may be, he can talk to you of a host of matters which you shall not understand. No insignificant part of the hundred-thousand-word list consists of a selection from such technical vocabularies. Every department of labor, of art, of science, has its special dialect, fully known only to those who have made themselves masters in that department. The world requires of every well-

informed and educated person a certain amount of knowledge in many of them, along with a corresponding part of their peculiar languages; but he must be an Admirable Crichton indeed who has mastered them all. Where is the man who will not find, on each page of the comprehensive dictionaries now in vogue, many strange words, which need defining to his apprehension, which he could not be sure of employing in the right place and connection? And this, not in the technical portions only of our vocabulary. There are words, or meanings of words, no longer in familiar use, antiquated or obsolescent, which yet may not be denied a place in the English language. There are objects which almost never fall under the notice of great numbers of people, or of whole classes of the community, and to whose names, accordingly, when met with, these are unable to attach any definite idea. There are cognitions, conceptions, feelings, which have not come up before the minds of all, which all have not had occasion nor acquired power to express. Hence we cannot fail to draw the conclusion that there is no less difference between the vocabularies at the command of different classes and individuals, than between their modes of pronunciation and tones of utterance. It might be hard to find two persons, the limits of whose speech were precisely correspondent.

Once more, not all who speak the same tongue attach the same meaning to the words they utter. So far, indeed, as words are designations of definite objects, cognizable by the senses, there is little danger of our misapprehending one another when we speak of them. Yet there is room for no little discordance even here, as the superior knowledge or the more vivid imagination of one person gives to the idea called up by a name a far richer content than another can put into it. Two men talk of the sun; but to the one he is a mere ball of light and heat, which rises in the sky every morning, and goes down again at night; to the other, all that science has taught us respecting the nature of the great luminary, and its influence upon our little planet, is more or less distinctly present every time he utters its name. I feel a tolerable degree of confidence that the impressions of color made on my sense are the same with those made upon my friend's sense, so that, when

we use the word "red," or "white," or "blue," we do not mean different things; and yet even here there is the possibility that one of us may be afflicted with some degree of color-blindness, so that we do not apprehend the same shades precisely alike. But just so is the personality of the speaker liable to make itself felt in the use of every part of language; most of all, of course, where matters of more subjective apprehension are concerned. The voluptuary, the passionate and brutal, the philosophic, and the sentimental, for instance, mean very different feelings when they speak of "love," or of "hate." Not half the words in our familiar speech, surely, would be identically defined by any considerable number of those who use them every day. It is needless to multiply illustrations. Who knows not that verbal disputes, discussions turning on the meaning of words, are the most frequent, bitter, and interminable of controversies? Words are not images of ideas, reflected in a faultless mirror, nor are sentences colored photographs of thoughts; they are but imperfect and fragmentary sketches, giving just outlines enough to enable the sense before which they are set up to seize the view intended, and to fill it out to a complete picture; while yet, as regards the completeness of the filling out, the details of the work, and the finer shades of coloring, no two minds will produce pictures perfectly accordant with one another, nor will any precisely reproduce the original.

Hence we are guilty of no paradox in maintaining that, while we all speak the English language, the English of each individual among us is different from that of every other: it is different in form; it is different in extent; it is different in meaning.

What, then, is the English language? We answer: It is the immense aggregate of the articulated signs for thought accepted by and current among a certain vast community, which we call the English-speaking people, embracing the principal portion of the inhabitants of our own country and of Great Britain, with all those who elsewhere in the world talk like them. It is the sum of the separate languages of all the members of this community. Or, as each one says some things, or says them in a way not to be accepted as in the best sense

English, it is their average rather than their sum ; it is that part of the aggregate which is supported by the usage of the majority, — a majority not counted by numbers alone, but in great part also by culture and education. It is a mighty region of speech, of somewhat fluctuating and uncertain boundaries, of which each one occupies a portion, while a certain central tract is included in the portions of all. There they meet on common ground ; off it, they are strangers to one another. Though one language, it includes numerous varieties, of greatly differing kind and degree, — individual varieties, class varieties, local varieties. Almost any two individuals who speak it may talk so as to be unintelligible to one another. The fact which gives it unity is, that all the individuals who speak it may, to a considerable extent, and on subjects of the most general and pressing interest, talk so as to understand each other.

How the language is kept in existence is clear from the foregoing exposition. It is preserved by an uninterrupted tradition. Each generation hands it down to the generation following. Every one is an actor in the process ; in each separate person the language has, as we may say, a separate and independent existence, and each does what in him lies to propagate it, — that is, his own part of it, affected by his individual and inherited peculiarities. And weak and limited as may be the share of each one in the work, the sum of all constitutes the force which effects the transmission of the whole language. In the case of a language like ours, too, these private labors are powerfully aided and supplemented by the influence of a literature. Each book is a kind of undying individual, who talks often with much larger numbers than any living person can find access to, and teaches them to speak as he speaks. A great body of literary works of recognized merit and authority, in the midst of a people fond and proud of it, is an agent in the preservation and transmission of any tongue, the importance of which cannot easily be overestimated, and must be taken into account in all our inquiries into the history of languages. But each work is, after all, only a single person, with his limitations and deficiencies, and with his restricted influence. Even Shakespeare, with his unrivalled wealth and va-

riety of expression, uses but about fifteen thousand words, and Milton little more than half so many, — mere fragments of the encyclopedic English tongue. Nothing less than the combined effort of a community, with all its variety of needs, circumstances, and dispositions, is equal to the task of keeping instinct with life a dialect capable of answering the purposes of a community. A language would be soon shorn of its strength, if placed exclusively in the keeping of any individual or of any class.

No one, we are sure, can fail to allow that this is a true and faithful description of the process by which we acquire and transmit our “mother tongue.” But the facts and conditions of which we have been treating are of no exceptional character; on the contrary, they are common to all the forms of speech current among the sons of men. Throughout the world, the same description, in all its essential features, will be found to hold good. Every spoken language is a congeries of individual signs, called words; and each word, with the exception of new creations, of which we shall take account later, was learned by every person who employs it from some other person who had employed it before him. He adopted it as the sign of a certain idea, because it was already in use by others as such. Inner and essential connection between idea and word, whereby the mind which conceives the one at once recognizes and produces the other, there is none in any language upon earth: it is all a matter of convention and tradition. The most important part of every spoken tongue, that which the child acquires, is received implicitly, without thought of a reason other than the authority of usage. In later life, in a greater or less degree, according as his curiosity happens to be turned in that direction, the man pleases himself with etymological inquiries, with tracing out why this and that word which he has learned or learns is used in the sense it bears; but the reason he discovers is only an external one, founded in history and tradition. It amounts to this, that other words had been previously used in certain other senses. He never arrives at an ultimate and necessary cause. As far as its history can be traced, — for we need not enter here into the recondite and difficult question of the absolute origin of human speech, — every existing lan-

guage is a body of arbitrary and conventional signs for thought, handed down by tradition from one generation to another, no individual in any generation receiving or transmitting the whole body, but the sum of all the separate givings and takings being effective to maintain the language in essentially unimpaired integrity.

Hitherto, certainly, we have found nothing which should suggest to us the opinion that language has an independent life of its own; that it exists at all save in the minds of those who speak it, or can be subject to any influence which does not proceed from them. But we have been leaving out of sight one very important part of linguistic life, or linguistic history, whichever it may finally appear to be, and to this it becomes us next to turn our attention.

The process of transmission of speech is not a perfect one; it never succeeds in keeping any language entirely pure and unaltered. On the contrary, every spoken tongue is and always has been undergoing a slow process of alteration, — enough to effect, in course of time, a considerable change in its constitution, rendering it to all intents and purposes a new language, unintelligible to its former speakers. The modifications introduced are of every possible kind. The vocabulary is changed by the loss of part of its old substance and the acquisition of new; words already in use receive new meanings, in addition to, or in substitution for, those which they formerly possessed; words change their form and mode of pronunciation; the spoken alphabet is increased by elements heretofore unknown; means of grammatical expression are lost, others, perhaps, taking their places. Incessant change and growth are the inseparable accompaniment and sign of life in language, as everywhere else. By way of example, let us look at the history of our own tongue during the period of our historical knowledge of it. How much is there in our present familiar speech which would have been strange and unintelligible to a contemporary of Shakespeare! No well-informed man of that day could understand otherwise than very imperfectly what one of us might write or say upon matters of which our whole community are thinking and talking. How much, again, do we find in Shakespeare that is no

longer good current English! — forms of construction, terms of expression, which never fall from our lips now except in quotation; scores of words which are obsolete, or not employed by us in their ancient signification. Go back still further, from half-century to half-century, and the case grows rapidly worse; and when we arrive at Chaucer, who is separated from us by a paltry interval of five hundred years, only fifteen or twenty descents from father to son, we meet with a dialect which has a half foreign look, and can only be read by careful study and with the aid of a glossary. Another like interval of five hundred years brings us to the Anglo-Saxon of King Alfred, which is absolutely a strange tongue to us, — not less unintelligible than the German of the present day, and nearly as hard to learn. And yet every one of those thirty or forty generations of Englishmen through whom we are descended from the contemporaries of King Alfred was as simply and single-mindedly engaged to transmit to its children the same language which it had received from its ancestors, as is the generation of which we ourselves form a part. Are we, then, compelled to acknowledge that there is in language a principle of growth, a tendency to variation, independent of the action of those who speak it, and too powerful for them to resist?

In order to answer the question intelligently and surely, we must examine a little more particularly the modes of change which together make up the growth of language.

The most rapid and noticeable of these is the variation which goes on without ceasing in the extent and meaning of the vocabulary of every spoken tongue. As the stock of words at the command of each individual is an approximate measure of the sum of his knowledge, so the stock of words composing a language is the expression of all that is known in the community. Speech which signifies more, or which indicates less, than is in the minds of its speakers, would be alike impossible. But every trade and handicraft, every science, every art, is constantly changing its materials, its processes, and its products; and its technical dialect must be modified accordingly, while so much of the results of the change as concerns the general public inevitably works its way into the common speech. As our material condition varies, as our ways of life, our institu-

tions, private and public, become other than they have been, all is found reflected in our language. In these days of railroads, steamboats, and telegraphs, of sun-pictures, of chemistry and geology, of improved wearing-stuffs, furniture, styles of building, articles of food, and luxury of every description, how many words and phrases are in every one's mouth which would be utterly unintelligible to the most learned man of a century ago, were he to rise from his grave and walk our streets! Nor is it only in these grosser and more material ways that the necessity for the expansion of language arises. New views of the fundamental relations of things, new ideas in philosophy, in politics, in morals, in religion, equally, from time to time, demand and obtain their appropriate expression. Language, in short, expands and contracts in adaptation to the circumstances and needs of those who use it; it is enriched or impoverished along with the enrichment or impoverishment of their minds. Put an unlettered English family on a coral islet in the Pacific, and cut it off from intercourse with the rest of the world, and in two or three generations half the vocabulary with which it used to discuss the varied nature and the changeful experiences of its Northern life will have decayed and become extinct. Transfer, on the other hand, a tribe of savages from such an islet to a country like Iceland, and how rapidly will its speech grow in names and expressions for objects, processes, experiences, emotions, relations!

What agency, now, is efficient in bringing about the adaptation of human language to human circumstance? To maintain that it is any other than that of men themselves, would be the height of absurdity. Or is it to be believed that, when some individual has brought forth a product of any of the modes of activity, physical or intellectual, of which man is capable, language spontaneously extrudes a word for its designation? When an acute and learned Italian physician, in the last century, discovered a new physical agency, it got, we presume, the name "galvanism" in no other way than that some one christened it after its discoverer. Most of us remember how, not many years ago, a French *savant* devised a novel and universally interesting application of certain chemical processes, and, by some person whose authority the community ratified,

the product was called a "daguerrotype"; and these two words are now as genuine and well-established parts of the English language as are "sun" and "moon," or "father" and "mother." The students of the earth's crust, since the beginning of the present century, have elicited a host of new facts in its history, have divided and classified its strata and their contents, have brought to light numberless relations, of cause and effect, of succession, of origin and value, which had hitherto lain hidden in it; and language has compliantly furnished the means for their expression. The whole technical vocabulary of geology has been brought into the English language within a few years past; but it would be hard to convince the geologists that the work was accomplished by any other instrumentality than their own. So with botany; so with metaphysics; so with any other branch of science or art whatever. Those who see are also those who say: the ingenuity that could find the thing was never at a loss to devise also the appellation. How the appellation is obtained is a matter not concerning our present question: whether it be merely a compound word or phrase; or an old member of our own vocabulary, turned to a new use without change of form; or a member of the vocabulary of another community, ancient or modern, pressed into our service with mutilation of form and tone, and with distortion of meaning, — it is equally an addition made by human means to the stores of expression of our mother tongue.

Nor is it otherwise with the rarer and obscurer cases in which are produced grammatical forms, those aids of another character to our resources for the distinct expression of thought. The student of linguistic science holds that all such forms are generated by the combination of two independent vocables: every formative element, whether suffix or prefix, was originally a separate word, which has grown on, as we often term it, to the root or theme of which it comes to form an appendage. The phrase "grown on" blinds to the true character of the process no one who has an open sense. It means only that men spoke the two words together until habit made them seem to belong to one another, and to constitute a single instead of a double entity. As *can* and *not* have "grown" into *cannot*, *fourteen* and *night* into *fortnight*, as *full* has been added to a

long list of nouns, forming such compounds as *fearful*, *truthful*, *hopeful*, until it has almost come to seem to us a mere adjective suffix, like the *ous* of *duteous*, *perilous*, *piteous*; as the adverbial ending *ly* has “grown,” by a succession of slight changes of form, meaning, and application, out of an oblique case of the adjective *like*, during the modern period of development of our language, — just so has it been back to the very beginning of the history of conjugations and declensions. Men said *je aimer ai*, “I have to love,” until they found it easier and more convenient to say *j’aimerai*, “I shall love”; they said *I love did*, until it seemed to them desirable to convert it into *I love-d*. To suppose a force in action other than the human mind seeking means to its ends, — to assume any kind of vocabulary attraction, drawing the two elements together and making them coalesce into one, — were as palpably gratuitous here as we have found it in the other cases considered.

We have thus far given our attention chiefly to the causes which lead to the production of new words and phrases, or to the way in which a language is built up. But a not less important part of linguistic history depends upon the action of forces of a contrary character, — those which pull down a language, tending to the defacement and destruction of its existing material. The actual loss, indeed, of words and meanings of words from the outer or inner content of a vocabulary is too common and simple a phenomenon to require that we dwell upon it. It is sufficient that a word or phrase come to appear to those who have been accustomed to use it unnecessary and superfluous, whether as denoting something belonging only to a bygone time, or as superseded by a more acceptable expression, and they cease to employ and transmit it; it drops out of memory and out of existence, — unless, indeed, there be a literature to keep up its remembrance, and its memory, with due record of its history and departed worth, be deposited, labelled “obsolete,” in a dictionary. Of vastly greater consequence, and demanding a more detailed exposition and illustration, are those wearing-out processes which, while they leave the identity of a word undestroyed, yet metamorphose and mutilate it, changing its substance, clipping off its members, until it is as unlike its former self, and as unrecognizable by its ancient

acquaintance, as is the maimed and withered old cripple, grown out of the whole-limbed and blooming boy. Our own language is one of the most remarkable examples known in linguistic history of the excessive prevalence of these destructive tendencies. Thus, our verbs had once a declension as rich as that found in Greek or Sanskrit; our *am*, *art*, *is*, are the lineal descendants of *asmi*, *assi*, *asti*, used by our remote ancestors; where we say *we lie*, *ye lie*, *they lie*, they said *lagamasi*, *lagatasi*, *laganti*. Our adjectives, only a thousand years ago, were varied as fully as *bonus* or *agathos*, each in two different declensions, with three genders, and four or five cases in each number. The monosyllables, of which the Anglo-Saxon portion especially of our daily speech is in so great measure composed, are the scanty relics of long polysyllabic forms. Thus, to take one or two rather extreme examples, our *had*, in "we had," can be shown to stand for an original *habaidedeima*, our *alms* is an abbreviation of the Greek *eleēmosunē*. And, as in the case of *alms*, our written words are sown not sparingly with silent letters, relics of their latest changes of utterance, once essential elements of their phonetic structure, now dead and unfortunately not buried: take as instances *gnaw*, *psalm*, *doubt*, *plough*, *sword*, *chestnut*. Others are just through, or trying to pass through, a like process: in *often* and *soften*, good usage sides with the corruption, and accuses of being old-fashioned or affectedly precise the not insignificant class who still pronounce the *t*; while, on the other hand, it stigmatizes as vulgar those who presume to say *cap'n* for *captain*. So far has our spelling become divorced from our pronunciation, that we have hardly a letter that is not uttered in from two to a dozen different ways, hardly a sound that is not written in as many. And, strangest of all, our sense of the fitness of things has become so debauched by our training in the midst of vicious surroundings, that the great majority of us seriously believe and soberly maintain that this is a happy condition of things; that it is far better to spell our words as somebody else pronounced them, a long time since, than as we pronounce them ourselves!

But we are suffering ourselves to be enticed away from the conclusion at which we were aiming, which is this: as it is most conspicuously and universally true in English, so it is

generally true in all language, that words do not maintain themselves unchanged in the form and semblance which belonged to them at the outset of their linguistic life. To trace upward the alterations which they have undergone, to determine the shapes they have successively worn, back, if possible, to the beginning, — and, at the same time, to discover their mutations of meaning, which are not less extensive and surprising, — is the business of the etymologist; and the labors of the etymologist are the foundation upon which rests the whole structure of the science of language.

This process of mutilation and corruption, of wearing out, of structural disintegration, of phonetic decay, or whatever else we may choose to style it, is one, accordingly, to which each separate constituent of every spoken tongue is, in varying degree and manner, alike exposed. And the reason is everywhere substantially the same, being inherent in the character of a word, as it has been already here defined. A word is not the natural counterpart of an idea, nor its depiction, nor even its definition; it is only its designation, an arbitrary and conventional sign with which we learn to associate it. Hence, when a word is originated as the sign of a conception, it is only necessary that there should be something accompanying it — as its connection with other signs, already accepted and understood, the circumstances in which it is used, an explanation given along with it, — any or all of these — which shall show clearly what it is meant to designate. The tie between sound and sense, always an external one, may be either close and obvious, or trivial and obscure. But when once the sign is accepted and its meaning recognized, — when once the association is established between it and the idea, — then the reason which prompted its selection is no longer a matter of consequence, and is willingly lost sight of; the original and proper meaning of the term, perhaps, remains for a time apparent to the mind that reflects upon it, but fades out and disappears altogether, or is recoverable only by an effort. Let us look at an example. There is a certain class of insects, the most brilliant and beautiful which the entomologist knows. Its most common species, both in the Old World and the New, are of a yellow color; clouds of these yellow flutterers, at certain sea-

sons, swarm upon the roads and fill the air. Because, now, butter is or ought to be yellow, our simple and unromantic ancestors called the insect in question the "butterfly," as they called a certain familiar yellow flower the "buttercup." In our usage, this word has become the name, not of the yellow species only, but of the whole class. No one now invests it with the paltry and prosaic associations which would naturally cluster about it; it is, from long alliance in our thoughts with the elegant creatures which it designates, instinct with poetic beauty and grace. And, though its form is unmutilated, and its composition as clear as on the day when the words were first put together to make it, probably not one person in ten thousand of those who employ it has ever thought of its origin, or inquired why it was applied to the use in which it serves him.

Thus it is that in practice we disencumber our terms of the traditional remembrances which, if kept up, would draw off the attention desirable to be concentrated upon the sign and the thing signified. We tend to accept each word as an integral representative of the object or conception to which we attach it, and give our mind to that, not concerning ourselves with questions of etymologies. Practical convenience is made the paramount consideration, to which every other is obliged to give way. Hence follow those consequences which we are now considering, the mutilations and mutations of form to which every item of language is subjected. No sooner have we coined a word than we begin — not, of course, with deliberate forethought, but spontaneously, and as it were unconsciously — to see how the muscular effort expended in its utterance can be economized, how it can be contracted into a briefer form, how any difficult combination of sounds which it presents can be mouthed over into a shape better adapted for fluent utterance, what part of it can be spared without loss of intelligibility. We have put together, to form the title of a petty naval officer, the two words *boat* and *swain*; but the sailors have no leisure for a full pronunciation of such cumbersome compounds as *bōatswāin*, — they call it simply *bos'n*; and it is a chance if a single one among them who has not learned to read and write can tell you why he of the whistle goes by such a name. How many in the community would

have a thought of the composition of *forehead*, if they did not see and spell as well as hear and speak it? Thousands of years ago, the forefathers of our division of the human family formed a termination for the first person plural for their verbs in a manner akin with that in which we, within the past thousand, have formed our adverbial ending *ly*, in *truly*, *fairly*, and so on; they compounded with their verbal root two pronouns, *ma*, meaning "me, I," and *si*, meaning "thou." *Laga-masi*, then, signified at first, in a manner patent to every speaker's apprehension, "lie — I and thou," that is to say, "we lie." But the consciousness of the origin and independent meaning of the ending soon becoming dimmed, its native condition being forgotten in its new office, it began to undergo the process of reduction to simpler form. In Latin it appears abbreviated of its final vowel; thus, *legi-mus*. In the ancient Gothic, it has been cut down to its initial letter, thus, *liga-m*, in which condition it is still sufficiently distinctive. But the growing habit of prefixing the pronouns to the verb in speaking had rendered the endings not indispensable; accordingly, the Anglo-Saxon had reduced the three plural terminations to a single norm, saying *licgath* for all; and we, finally, in that general decay of forms which attended the elaboration of our mixed speech out of the two discordant elements of Anglo-Saxon and Norman French, have carried the process of mutilation to its farthest possible limit, by casting off the suffixes altogether, and with them, in this particular verb, the final consonant of the root itself; we say "I lie, we lie, ye lie, they lie," without variation of form, and yet not feeling that we have given up any essential part of that distinctness which the fuller forms were at first created to secure.

It would be easy to offer much more abundant illustration, but what has been given is sufficient for our present purpose. To set forth and exemplify all the varieties of phonetic change would require much more space than we can spare for it. The main motive efficient in bringing them about is everywhere nearly the same, — the desire to make things easier, or, it were perhaps better to say, to make things convenient. What the phonetic history of language shows to have been more convenient to the speakers of this and that tongue is not always what

to us may seem in itself easier. It is the part of the linguistic student to trace out all phonetic mutations, and to recognize, so far as he may, their ground, in the physical character and relations of the sounds concerned, in the positions and motives of the articulating organs by which those sounds are produced. But his power to account for the phenomena which he is treating has its limits. He can point out, in a host of cases, why certain sounds, in this or that position or combination, might easily and naturally pass over into such and such other sounds; but he can offer **no** real explanation of why the phonetic development of different languages takes so different a course; why sounds are found in the alphabet of one tongue which are unutterable by the speakers of another; why combinations which come easily from the organs of one people are painfully avoided by its neighbor and next of kin; why this race will tolerate no final consonant, that one no conjoined consonants, that other no hiatus between vowels; why here the final syllable of a word is always accented, and there the last but one, while yonder again quantity determines the place where the stress of voice shall rest, or it seems bound by no rule. These and their like are national idiosyncrasies, results of such subtle differences of organization, influences of circumstance and habit, whim and accident even, that they will ever baffle the study of the investigator. But he will not think of ascribing them in his perplexity to any other agency than that which brings about such phonetic changes as are most obviously a relief to the human organs; it is still the speakers of language who mouth over the words they utter, suiting them to their convenience and their caprice. We at present write *knight*, and pronounce it *nīt*; our ancestors spelled it *cniht*, and made every written element distinctly audible (giving the *i* our short *i*-sound, as in *pin*), just as the Germans even now both write and speak the same word *knecht*. It has undergone in our mouths a triple alteration; two of its changes are alleviations of the effort of utterance, and such as have numerous analogies in other constituents of our vocabulary: we have silenced *k* and *g* initial before *n* in not a few other words, as also everywhere the guttural *b* after a vowel. The third change, the conversion of the simple *i*-sound into the

diphthongal *âi*, of which that sound is only the final element, is also so common with us that we have come to know the diphthong by the name of "long *i*." The original *u*'s of the Anglo-Saxon have in almost equal number been made over into *ou*'s, as in our *hound* for Anglo-Saxon *hund*, also *mouth* for *mâth*, etc., by a precisely similar process. These last are cases of an increase and strengthening, instead of a diminution, of the sound; while yet it is impossible to look upon the augmentation of the vowel in *knight* as due to the action of one kind of force, and the loss of two of its consonantal elements as caused by another. It is very hard to see why the Armenian language has converted its ancient surd mutes into sonants, and its sonants into surds, just as it is hard to see why the London dialect drops its initial *h*'s and aspirates its initial vowels; it is yet more mysterious that, in all Germanic speech, the surd, aspirate, and sonant mutes should have been made to exchange places with one another. We have no reason to doubt, however, that the Armenians and Germans were the real agents in bringing about the first and last mutations, any more than that the cockneys are to blame for the other.

It was necessary to dwell and insist a little upon this point, because some eminent linguistic authorities, while fully acknowledging that most of the phenomena of phonetic change are to be referred to the action of human beings, endeavoring to economize the muscular effort expended in articulation, yet seek to make exceptions of all cases which are not distinctly traceable to such a tendency, and to ascribe them to some mysterious and indefinable force inherent in language itself.

We have now completed our cursory review of the processes of linguistic life, — the birth of language in the individual, the mode of its propagation, and the growth and development which attend its continued existence. And we have found nowhere any phenomena requiring for their explanation the assumption of an agency apart from that of the users of language. Such an assumption is uncalled for by the facts which the research of the student brings to light; it is emphatically excluded by the fundamental view of language which those facts force upon his acceptance. What independent life, what

effective force, can there be in a system of words, each one of which is a mere complex of articulated sounds, learned by us by imitation of the utterance of some one else, and applied as the sign of an object or conception in obedience to another's authority, or altered in the using, according to the exigencies of practical life, under the impulse of motives which are for the most part distinctly traceable? On what foundation, then, can rest the opinion of those who deny that language is or can be changed by men, and attribute to it the possession of inherent vital forces?

Professor Schleicher does not enter into a discussion of the doctrine, either in the little pamphlet which we have already cited, or in the fuller exposition of his linguistic philosophy given in the Introduction to his book on the German Language,* — a most interesting and instructive work, though not a little marred, in our opinion, by some such fundamentally erroneous views as the one now under discussion. He only assumes its truth as incontrovertible and unquestioned, and repeatedly asserts it in strong and confident terms. One of his statements of it has been quoted above. In the larger work he speaks, in a certain place (p. 118), of “language, supplied by Nature, subjected to unalterable laws of development, and possessing a constitution as wholly beyond the reach of the individual, as, for instance, it is out of the power of the nightingale to change her song.” And again (p. 39): “One can no more invent a language than a rose or a nightingale.” Now it was not intended, doubtless, that the comparisons here made should be taken as arguments; nevertheless, as they are the nearest approach to arguments which our author furnishes us, it is hardly possible to avoid scanning them a little closely, to see what force they may have as analogies. If the nightingale's song expressed knowledge, experience, reflection, instead of being a mere instinctive outburst of enjoyment of life; if it changed its character from generation to generation, and varied greatly among the birds of different districts; if the callow philomel learned it painfully from his parents while fledging, and perfected it by after intercourse with others of

* *Die Deutsche Sprache.* Von August Schleicher. Stuttgart, 1860. 8vo. pp. vi., 340.

his race; if the young nightingale brought up by hand in a cage, alone, would never know how to sing, and, if nursed by a crow, a quail, or a canary-bird, would caw, or whistle, or trill, like his foster-parents, — then would there be an analogy between the song of the bird and the language of a human being, and it would become our duty seriously and earnestly to inquire — as Professor Schleicher does not think it worth while to do in the case of language — whether the nightingale had not something to do with determining her own notes, instead of their being airy entities, which lived and grew and changed of themselves in her throat. As the matter stands, the comparison is utterly meaningless; it has not so much ground to rest upon as could be covered with the point of a needle. That which in man can be paralleled with the bird's song is his laugh, his cry, his cough, his sneeze; these he can, in truth, no more change than the nightingale can change her note.

Professor Müller is more explicit, and allows us to see not only his opinion, but the reasons on which he founds it. After saying (p. 47) that, “although there is a continuous change in language, it is not in the power of man either to produce or to prevent it: we might think as well of changing the laws which control the circulation of our blood, or of adding an inch to our height, as of altering the laws of speech, or inventing new words according to our own pleasure,” — he goes on to cite cases in which two famous Emperors, Tiberius of Rome, and Sigismund of Germany, committed blunders in their Latin, and were taken to task and corrected by humble grammarians, who informed their imperial Majesties that, however great and absolute their power might be, it was not competent to produce an alteration in the Latin language. The argument and conclusion we may take to be of this character: if so high and mighty a personage as an Emperor could not do so small a thing as alter the gender and termination of a single word, — not even, as Sigismund attempted, in a language which was dead, and might therefore be supposed incapable of defending itself against the indignity, — much less can any one of inferior consideration hope to accomplish such a change, or any other of the changes, of greater or less account, which make up the

history of speech; therefore, language is incapable of alteration by its speakers.

The futility of drawing so important a conclusion from this pair of anecdotes, or from a score or a thousand like them, is almost too obvious to be worth pointing out, and the philosophy deserves to be called shallow which can blind itself with such a fallacy. We could readily counterbalance them with ten times as many, in which the *fiat* of an individual should be seen to have established or altered for all time some constituent of language. Let us refer to one or two familiar cases. As the first schooner ever built, here on the coast of Massachusetts, slid off her stocks and swam gracefully on the water, the chance exclamation of an admiring by-stander, "O, how she *scoons!*" drew from her contriver and builder the answer, "A *schooner* let her be, then," and made a new English word,—one invented, Müller to the contrary notwithstanding, "according to the own pleasure" of an individual. Ethnologists well know that the name of the so-called "Tartar" race is properly *Tatar*, and they are now endeavoring to restore this, its more correct orthography. The intrusion of the *r* has been accounted for in the following manner. When, in the reign of St. Louis of France, the hordes of this savage race were devastating Eastern Europe, the tale of their ravages was brought to the pious king, who exclaimed with horror, "Well may they be called *Tartars*, for their deeds are those of fiends from Tartarus!" The appositeness of the metamorphosed appellation made it take; and from that time French authors—and, after their example, the rest of Europe—called the *Tatars* "Tartars." Whether the story is incontestably authentic or not is of little account; any one can see that it might be true, and that such causes may have produced such effects times innumerable.

The error under which our authors labor is a fundamental and highly important one, and vitiates no small part of the linguistic philosophy of the present generation of writers on language. They do not sufficiently recognize the fact, that language, in its inception and through its whole history, is the work of a community; that the ideas of language and community are everywhere inseparable. Speech is not a personal, but

a social possession ; it belongs, not to the individual, but to the member of society. A solitary man would never form a language ; a pair, a family, a tribe, a race, could not live a lifetime without one, though they began as mute as the young nightingales. A Robinson Crusoe almost loses through disuse his own once familiar tongue ; a Swiss Family Robinson not only keep up theirs, but enrich it with expressions for all the new and strange places and products with which their novel circumstances bring them in contact. Speech does not, as is wont to be assumed, grow up within the individual as a natural reflex of his thoughts ; he neither evokes nor produces it for his private benefit, that his ideas may stand more distinct before his own sense, that he may know them better and combine them more effectually : it is called out by his wish to communicate with his fellows. The first word was no spontaneous outburst, realizing to the mind of the utterer the conception with which he was swelling ; it was the successful result of an endeavor to arrive at a sign by which his conception should be called up also in the mind of another. The desire of communication called forth speech ; the possibility of communication, as we have already seen, is the only tie which makes the unity of a spoken tongue ; the necessity of communication is the force which restrains the indefinite variation of language, and makes the individual, while he alone acts upon it, to preserve or alter it, act through and by the community of which he forms a part. Every sign which I utter, I utter by a voluntary effort of my organs, over which my will has indefeasible control ; I may alter the sign to any extent I please, and as I please, even to the extent of substituting for it some other wholly new sign ; only, if I shock by so doing the sense of those about me, or make myself unintelligible to them, I defeat the very end for which I speak at all. It constitutes no argument against the view we are defending, to urge that the individual mind, without language, would be a dwarfed and powerless organ. This is indeed true, but it means simply that man could develop his powers, and become what he was meant to be, only in society, by converse with his fellows. He is by his essential nature a social being, and his most precious individual possession, his speech, he gets only as a social being.

The maxim, *Usus norma loquendi*, "Usage is the rule of speech," is old and trite enough. But we are apt to look upon it as applying rather to the minor proprieties of speech, the niceties of expression, than to anything higher and deeper; while, in fact, it is the fundamental and universal law of language: we can give no other reason for anything we say than that "such is the usage." He who can direct usage, accordingly, can make language. Against what law more mighty than themselves did Müller's two Emperors offend? Against the immemorial and well-defined usage of those who wrote and had ever written Latin, — nothing else. What was their individual authority against this? An Emperor's grammatical blunders have no title to become the law of language, any more than those of the private man, except as fawning courtiers may imitate them, or conspicuous station may give them a more advantageous start toward the currency which they must win before they are language. The users of speech constitute a republic, or rather a democracy, in which authority is conferred only by general suffrage and for due cause, and is exercised under constant supervision and control. The builder of the first schooner was allowed to determine what it should be called by all the world, because the new thing wanted a new name, and there was no one else so well entitled as he to name it. If he had assumed to rebaptize a man-of-war a "schooner," no one but his next neighbors would ever have heard of the attempt. The discoverer of a new asteroid is permitted to select its title, provided he choose the name of a classical divinity, as is the established precedent for such cases; though, even then, he is liable to have the motives of his choice somewhat sharply looked into. The English astronomer who, a few years since, sought, with a more than becomingly obsequious loyalty, to call his planetling "Victoria," was compelled to retract the appellation and offer another.

If — to recur to our former illustrations — Galvani had denominated his new principle "popsticks," or if Daguerre had styled his sun-pictures "Aldiborontiphoscophornios," although these names would have been not less suitable than *galvanism* and *daguerrotype* in the apprehension of the masses, who never heard of the learned discoverers, and could not

appreciate the etymological aptness of *type*, yet those who are accustomed to direct public opinion in such matters would have revolted, and substituted other titles which seemed to them to possess an apparent reason and applicability. In a language circumstanced like ours, a conscious and detailed discussion not infrequently arises on the question of admitting some new word into its recognized vocabulary. We all remember the newspaper controversy, not long since, as to whether we ought to call a message sent by telegraph a "telegraph" or a "telegram"; and many of us, doubtless, are waiting to see how the authorities settle it, that we may govern our own usage accordingly. Again, we have a suffix *able*, which, like a few others that we possess, we employ pretty freely in forming new words. Within no very long time past, some writers and speakers have added it to the verb *rely*, forming the adjective *reliable*. The same thing must have happened at nearly the same time with other verbs, awakening neither question nor objection; while *reliable* is still shut out from the best, or at least from the most exclusive, society in English speech. And why? Because, in the first place, say the objectors, the word is unnecessary; we have already *trustworthy*, which means the same thing: further, it is formed improperly and falsely; as we say "to rely on" anything, the derivative adjective, if one is made, ought to be *reliable*, not *reliable*: finally, the word is low-caste; A, B, and C, those prime authorities in English style, are careful never to employ it. The other side, however, are obstinate, and do not yield the point. The first objection, say they, is insufficient, for no one can justly oppose the enrichment of the language by a synonyme, which may yet be made to distinguish a valuable shade of meaning, — nay, which already shows signs of doing so, as we tend to say "a *trustworthy* witness," but "*reliable* testimony." The second is false; English grammar is by no means so precise in its treatment of the suffix *able* as the objectors claim: it admits *laughable*, meaning "worthy to be laughed at," *unaccountable*, "not to be accounted for," *indispensable*, "not to be dispensed with," with many others of the same sort; and even *objectionable*, "liable to objection," *marriageable*, "fit for marriage," and so forth. As for the third objection, whatever A, B, and C may do, D, F, and H, with

most of the lower part of the alphabet, including nearly all the Xs, Ys, and Zs, the unknown quantities, use the new form freely, and it is in vain to stand out against the full acceptance of a word which is supported by so much and so respectable authority. How the dispute is likely, or ought, to terminate, need not concern us here ; it is referred to only because, while itself carried on consciously, and on paper, it is a typical illustration of a whole class of discussions which go on silently, and even more or less unconsciously, in every mind before which is presented, for acceptance or rejection, any proposed alteration in the usages of spoken speech. Is it called for ? Is it accordant with the analogies of the language ? Is it offered or backed by good authority ? These are the considerations by which general consent is won or repelled ; and general consent decides every case without appeal.

Those gradual changes which bring about the decay of grammatical structure, or the metamorphosis of phonetic form, in a language, go on in a yet more covert and unacknowledged way than the augmentations of its vocabulary. They are by their origin, almost universally, of the nature of blunders, inaccuracies of speech, vulgarisms, neglect or confusion of customary distinctions, mispronunciations. Their final prevalence attests the power and influence of that immense numerical majority among the speakers of almost every language who are not careful to speak correctly, but whose errors are by degrees forced upon the better-instructed class and adopted by them, so that they become the rule of good speech. We have seen that the transmission of language is by tradition. But traditional transmission is by its inherent character defective. If a story cannot pass a few times from mouth to mouth and maintain its integrity, neither can a word pass from generation to generation and keep its original form. Very young children, as every one knows, so mutilate their words and phrases that only those who are most familiar with them can understand them. But even an older child, who has learned to speak in general with tolerable correctness, has a special inaptness to utter a particular sound, and either omits it altogether or puts a substitute in its place. It drops a syllable or two from a long and cumbrous word. Having learned by prevailing experience that the past

tense of a verb is formed by the addition of a *d*, it imagines that, because it says "I loved," it must also say "I bringed"; or else, perhaps, remembering *I sang* from *I sing*, it says "I brang." It says "foots" and "mouses"; it says "gooder" and "goodest"; it confounds *sit* and *set*, *lie* and *lay* (which confusion, indeed, is most disgracefully common even among the adult and educated). Care, on its part and that of others, corrects by degrees such childish errors; but the care is often wanting or insufficient. And so long as the learning of language continues, so long continues the liability to this uncorrected misapprehension or inaccurate reproduction. Hence there always lies, in full vigor and currency, in the lower regions of language-speaking, as we may term them, a great host of deviations from good usage, sins against the proprieties of speech, kept down in the main by the combating influence of good speakers, yet all the time threatening to rise to the surface, and now and then succeeding, and forcing recognition from even the best authorities. He *spoke* was doubtless long a prevalent vulgarism, like he *come* or he *done* among us, before it finally crowded out of use he *spake*. Only two or three centuries ago, *its* was as shocking to the ear of the correct English speaker as *she's*, for *her*, would be at present; but few of us now read our Bibles so closely as to find out that they contain no such word. *You are* for *ye are*, and yet more for *thou art*, was once as detestable an offence against grammar as is the Quaker's *thee is* in our ears.

The circumstances among which we live are more favorable to the faithful transmission of language than any that have been known before, in any age or country of the world. The almost universal diffusion of instruction, the reading of the same books, the hearing of the same speakers, the social and public intercourse among all classes of our community, give an unprecedented force to the influences conservative of the English tongue, and there is no reason to fear that its structure will suffer during the next thousand years a tithe of the change of the past thousand. But, rapid or slow, its growth is always due to the same causes. Each one of us tries his series of experiments in the modification of his mother tongue, from the time when, as a child, he mutilates his words and frames inflections

upon false analogies, to that when, as a man, he is guilty of slang and bad grammar, or indulges in mannerisms and artificial conceits, or diverts words from their true uses, through ignorance or caprice. But his individual authority is too weak to prevail against general usage; his proposals, unless in special cases and for special reasons, are passed unnoticed, and he is forced to conform his speech to that of the rest; or, if he insist on his independence, he is contemned as a blunderer or laughed at as a humorist.

Thus it is indeed true, as claimed by our authors, that the individual has no power to change language. It is true, however, otherwise than as they understand it; not in any sense that denies the agency of the individual, but only as that agency is confessed to be inoperative save so far as it is accepted and ratified by those about him. Speech and the changes of speech are the work of the community; but there is no way in which the community can act except through the initiative of its individual members, which it follows or rejects. The fluent and shallow decriers of the conventionality of language are accustomed to maintain that the doctrine implies an assembling together of language-makers, and a deliberate discussion as to what shall be expressed, and how; and their opposition to it is grounded upon this absurd misrepresentation of its meaning. But that one man proposes, and that his comrade, his family, his locality, or his country accepts, and that the proposed sign or modification of a sign is understood and passes current, is language as far as it is accepted and no farther, — this is linguistic convention, the convention which makes and changes language, from its primitive inception down to the very latest stages of its history.

It must not be left unobserved that those even who hold the general view that man has nothing to do with the making of speech, yet in detail abundantly admit his interference. Thus Schleicher himself (*German Language*, p. 49) teaches that all phonetic change in language is the immediate result of the impulse to make things easy for our organs of speech; whether this is not more than the nightingale does to her song, we must leave him to settle. Still more does Müller, in numerous passages, put forth and defend opinions which are utterly opposed

to his fundamental dogma. He has frequent glimpses of the truth, more or less clear ; but he is unable to hold them steadily in view, to see how they stand related to one another, and to combine them into a whole. He speaks, for instance (p. 50), of the first impulse to a new formation in language as given by an individual, while yet "the results apparently produced by him depend on laws beyond his control, and on the co-operation of all those who form together with him one class, one body, or one organic whole." Leave out here the "laws," or understand them to be merely the laws of man's own individual and social nature and the laws imposed by the circumstances in which he is placed, — laws which govern his action in all other respects as well as in regard to language, — and we could ask nothing truer or more telling. But, in the next sentence, he conceives himself to have "just shown that language cannot be changed or moulded by the taste, the fancy, or the genius of man." Again, on the following page, he most justly denounces, as sheer mythology, our speaking "of language as a thing by itself, as living a life of its own, as growing to maturity, producing offspring, and dying away." And so, as he has denied the only two possibles, — the growth of language by itself, and the agency of man in producing its seeming growth, — we are not surprised when he declares that "it is very difficult to explain what causes the growth of language." In the presence of such confusion and uncertainty of thought as this, we can only judge him by the opinion which he holds and asserts with most confidence, namely, that language is not and cannot be affected by man, and that therefore its study is a physical science.

Our own conclusion is precisely the opposite of this. In our view, every creation or alteration in human speech, of whatever kind and of whatever degree of importance, goes back to some individual or individuals, who set it in circulation, from whose example it gained a wider and wider currency, until it finally won that general assent which is alone required to make anything in language proper and authoritative. The work of each individual is, indeed, done unpremeditatedly, or as it were unconsciously ; each is intent only on using the common possession for his own benefit, serving therewith his individual ends ;

but each is thus at the same time an actor in the great work of shaping and of perpetuating the general speech. So each separate polyp on a coral-bank devotes himself simply to the securing of his own food, and to the excretion of calcareous matter which is of no service to him ; but, as the joint result of the isolated labors of all, there slowly rises in the water the enormous coral-cliff, a barrier for the waves to dash themselves against in vain. No one ever set himself deliberately at work to invent or improve language, or did so, at least, with any valuable and abiding result ; it is all accomplished by a continual satisfaction of the need of the moment, by ever yielding to an impulse and grasping a possibility which the already acquired treasure of words and forms, and the habit of their use, suggest and put within reach. In this sense is language a growth ; it grows with the expansion of human needs and capacities, and in adaptation to them.

Of the same purely figurative character is all the phraseology to which we referred at the outset of our discussion as popularly current in regard to human speech. It is founded on analogies, striking and instructive ; its use is to be deprecated only when it is mistaken, as is too often the case, for the expression of simple objective truth. A language, like an organized body, is no mere aggregate of particles ; it is a complex of related and mutually helpful parts. As such a body grows by the accretion of something homogeneous with its own structure, as its already existing organs form the new addition, and form it for a determined purpose, — to aid in the general life, and to help the performance of the natural functions of the organized being, — so is it also with language ; its new stores are formed from, or assimilated to, its already existing material ; it enriches itself with the evolutions of its own internal processes, and in order to secure more fully the end of its being, the expression of the thought of those to whom it belongs. Its rise, development, decline, and extinction are like the birth, increase, decay, and death of a living creature. But there is a still closer parallelism between the life of language and that of the animal kingdom at large. The speech of each individual is, as it were, an individual of a species, with its general inherited conformity to the specific type, but also with its individual

peculiarities, its tendencies to variation and the formation of new species. The dialects, languages, groups, families, stocks, set up by the linguistic student, correspond with the varieties, species, genera, and so on, of the zoölogist. And the questions which the students of nature are so excitedly discussing at the present day, — the nature of specific distinctions, the derivation of species from one another by individual variation and natural selection, the unity of animal life in its inception, — all bear the nearest resemblance to those of which the linguistic student has constant occasion to treat. We cannot here dwell upon the comparison; it may be found drawn out by Lyell, in his work on the *Antiquity of Man* (Chapter XXIII.), with admirable skill, and an insight into the phenomena of speech which might shame many a professed philologist; and it is made by him the foundation of a highly interesting analogical argument bearing on the mutation of species. It is also the groundwork of Schleicher's little work, of which the title is placed at the head of this article. The author, who had been urged to the perusal of Darwin's book on the *Origin of Species* by one of his colleagues, an ardent Darwinian, here renders the latter an account of the results of his study. He, too, fully accepts the new theory of the development of species, and not upon Darwin's grounds alone, but because he regards it as proved true by the parallel and essentially similar facts of the development of language. It is unnecessary to point out that the proof is nugatory, because the correspondence is not essential, but analogical only: we cannot but be surprised at finding a sounder appreciation of the nature of linguistic phenomena in the English geologist than in the German philologist.

Again, a noteworthy and often-remarked similarity exists between the facts and methods of geology and those of linguistic study. The science of language is, as it were, the geology of the latest period, the Age of Man, having for its task to construct the history of development of the earth and its inhabitants from the time when the geological record becomes silent; when man, no longer a mere animal by the aid of language, begins to bear witness respecting his own progress and that of the world about him. The remains of ancient speech are like strata deposited in bygone ages, telling of the

forms of life then existing, and of the circumstances which determined or affected them; while words are as rolled pebbles, relics of yet more ancient formations; or as fossils, whose grade indicates the progress of organic life, and whose resemblances and relations show the correspondence or succession of the different strata; while, everywhere, extensive denudation has marred the completeness of the record, and rendered impossible detailed exhibition of the whole course of progress.

Yet farther analogies, hardly less striking than these, might doubtless be found by a mind curious of such things. But they would be, like these, analogies merely, interesting as illustrations, but becoming fruitful of error when, letting our fancy run away with our reason, we allow them to determine our fundamental views respecting the nature of language and of its study; when we call human speech a living and growing organism, or pronounce linguistics a physical science, because zoölogy and geology are such. Language is, in fact, an institution, — the word is an awkward one, but we can find none better, — the work of those whose wants it subserves; it is in their sole keeping and control; it has been by them adapted to their circumstances and wants, and is still everywhere undergoing at their hands such adaptation; every separate item of which it is composed is the product of a series of changes, effected by the will and consent of men, working themselves out under historical conditions, and conditions of man's nature, and by the impulse of motives, which are still more or less traceable. These considerations determine the character of the study of language as an historical or moral science. It is a branch of the history of the human race and of human institutions. It calls for aid upon various other sciences, both moral and physical; upon mental and metaphysical philosophy, for an account of the associations which underlie the developments of signification, and of the laws of thought, the universal principles of relation, which fix the outlines of grammar; upon physiology, for explanation of the structure and mode of operation of the organs of speech, and the physical relations of articulate sounds, which determine the laws of euphony, and prescribe the methods of phonetic change; upon physical geography and meteorology, for information respecting

material conditions and climatic aspects, which have exerted their influence upon linguistic growth. But the human mind, seeking and choosing expression for human thought, stands as middle term between all determining causes and their results in the development of language. It is only as they affect man himself, in his desires and tendencies or in his capacities, that they can affect speech. The immediate agent is the will of man, working under the joint direction of impelling wants, governing circumstances, and established habits. What makes a physical science is, that it deals with material substances, acted on by material forces. In the formation of geological strata, the ultimate cognizable agencies are the laws of matter; the substance acted on is tangible matter, the product is inert, insensible matter. In language, on the other hand, the ultimate agencies are intelligent beings, the material is sound made significant of thought, and the product is of the same kind, a system of sounds with intelligible content, expressive of the slowly accumulated treasure of the human race in wisdom, experience, comprehension of itself and of the rest of creation. What but an analogical resemblance can there possibly be between the studies of things so essentially dissimilar?

There is a certain school of modern philosophers who are trying to *naturalize* all science, to eliminate the distinction between the physical and the intellectual and moral, to declare for naught the free action of the human will, and to resolve the whole story of the fates of mankind into a series of purely material effects, produced by assignable physical causes, and explainable in the past, or determinable for the future, by an intimate knowledge of those causes, by a recognition of the action of compulsory motives upon the obedient nature of man. With such, language will naturally pass, along with the rest, for a physical product, and its study for a physical science; and however we may dissent from their general classification, we cannot criticise its application in this particular instance. But by those who still hold to the grand distinction of moral and physical sciences, who think the action of intelligent beings, weighing motives and selecting courses of conduct, seeing ends and seeking means for their attainment, to be fundamentally different from that of atoms moved by gravity,

chemical affinity, and the other invariable forces of nature, as we call them,—by such, the study of language, whose dependence upon voluntary action is so absolute that not one word ever was or will be uttered without the distinct exertion of the human will, cannot but be regarded as a moral science; its real relationship is with those branches of human knowledge among which common opinion is wont to rank it,—with mental philosophy, with philology, with history.

One motive—in great part, doubtless, an unconscious one—impelling certain students of language to claim for their favorite branch of investigation a place in the sisterhood of physical sciences, has been, we cannot but think, an apprehension lest otherwise they should be unable to prove it entitled to the rank of a science at all. There is a growing disposition on the part of the devotees of physical studies,—a class greatly and rapidly increasing in numbers and influence,—to restrict the honorable title of science to those departments of knowledge which are founded on the immutable laws of material nature, and to deny the possibility of scientific method and scientific results where the main element of action is the varying and capricious will of man. The apprehension, however, is needless, as the tendency which calls it forth is unreasonable and erroneous. The name *science* admits no such restriction. The vastness of a field of study, the unity in variety of the facts it includes, their connection by such ties that they allow of strict classification and offer fruitful ground for deduction, and the value of the results attained, the truth deduced,—these things make a science. And, in all these respects, the study of language need fear a comparison with no one of the physical sciences. Its field is the speech of all mankind, cultivated or savage, the thousands of existing dialects, and all their recorded predecessors, with the countless multitudes of details furnished by them, each significant of a fact in human history, external or internal. The wealth of languages is like the wealth of species in the animal creation. Their tie of connection is the unity of human nature in its wants and capacities, the unity of human knowledge, of the universe and its relations, to be apprehended by the mind and reflected in speech,—a bond as infinite in its ramifications among all the varieties of human

language, and as powerful in its binding force, as is the unity of plan of vegetable or animal life. The results, finally, for human history, the history of mind, of civilization, of ethnic descent, for the comprehension of man in his high endowments and his use of them, are of surpassing interest. To compare their worth with that of the results derivable from other sciences were to no good purpose; all truth is valuable, and that which pertains to the nature and history of man himself is, to say the least, not inferior in interest to that which concerns his surroundings.

Linguistic science, then, has in itself enough of dignity and true scientific character not to need to borrow aught of either from association with other branches of inquiry which differ from it in subject and scope, while yet they seek the same objects, the increase of knowledge and the advancement of the human race.

ART. V. — *Messages of the President of the United States to Congress, with accompanying Documents.* Washington. 1861 – 1865.

A CAREFUL study of these volumes will show the greater certainty and precision which the events of the last four years have given to those rules of international law which determine the rights and duties of neutral and belligerent nations.

International law is nothing else than the practice, the usages of nations. To find its rules, the archives of states must be searched. Treaties between nations must be examined, not to show what the law is, but how it has been defined, and what exceptions particular nations have made to it; for treaties are to the law of nations what statutes are to the common law. The decisions of judges must be read, who, like Lord Stowell, have felt that in their own country they were really deciding for the world. When these authorities have been examined, there will still remain the large number of books which have been written to show what the usage of nations has been, or what the author thinks it should be.